United Nations

Daily Highlights

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Security Council, approving proposals in Secretary-General's report on South Africa, decides to expand UNOMSA mandate to include observation of elections next April; urges all South African parties to participate in elections and to take measures to end violence and intimidation.

+ Secretary-General, in Geneva, tells Governing Council of Compensation Commission reviewing claims following Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that Commission reflects vitality of international law and growing role of United Nations; Secretary-General to meet with President of Syria tomorrow.

+ In response to ongoing crisis in Burundi, World Food Programme to extend for six months emergency aid for nearly 1 million refugees and internally displaced people affected by recent ethnic conflict.

+ Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women to hold 13th session at Headquarters from 17 January to 4 February; in addition to reports of States parties, agenda includes situation of women in former Yugoslavia and 1995 World Conference on Women.

+ United Nations body negotiating international convention to combat desertification begins third substantive session at Headquarters on Monday; in final form, convention is expected to be adopted and opened for signature in June.

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The Security Council today decided to expand the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa (UNOMSA) to include observation of the elections to be held in that country on 27 April. The Council took that action by unanimously adopting resolution 894 (1994), by which it agreed to the Secretary-General's proposals regarding UNOMSA's role in the elections.

In a report on South Africa dated 10 January, the Secretary-General proposed that the United Nations provide some 1,800 observers to assess the freedom and fairness of the elections and to monitor each stage of the

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election process. Based on its long-term activities, UNOMSA would be "uniquely capable" of evaluating the extent to which the elections truly reflected the will of the South African people, he said. Along with observers from the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the European Union, the Commonwealth and individual States, the United Nations observers would form a core group almost 3,000 strong.

The Security Council urged all parties in South Africa, including those which did not participate fully in the multi-party talks, to respect agreements reached during the negotiations, to adhere to democratic principles and to take part in the elections. The Council called on all parties to take measures to end the violence and intimidation, and said it expected that anyone who sought to disrupt the elections would be held accountable for such actions. It also called on all parties to respect the safety of the international observers and to facilitate the carrying out of their mandate.

The Council welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to set up a special Trust Fund to finance the participation of additional observers from Africa and other developing countries and urged States to contribute to it. It also decided to remain seized of the matter until a democratic, non-racial and united South Africa was established.

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Continuing his visit to Geneva, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali met today with Carlos Alzamora, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Compensation Commission. The Commission was established by the Security Council to review compensation claims resulting from Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. He then attended a special meeting of the Commission's Governing Council.

In an address to the Governing Council, the Secretary-General said that the creation of the Commission showed the vitality of international law. It also reflected the expanding role of the United Nations in international relations, and the innovative way in which the Organization had faced up to its new responsibilities. The Commission would have to deal with a huge number of claims -- more than 2.3 million had been submitted to date -- but would be ready to act on the first awards by next April. That undertaking would bring relief to many suffering victims, and would also highlight the international community's condemnation of aggression, and its rejection of violence as a means of resolving disputes.

Also today, the Secretary-General discussed the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations in Switzerland with a delegation representing Switzerland and the canton of Geneva. He was also due to meet with Sadako Ogata, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and with Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Tomorrow, the Secretary-General is expected to meet with Hafez Al-Asad, President of Syria.

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The World Food Programme (WFP) has announced it will extend for six months its regional emergency relief operation for nearly 1 million refugees and internally displaced people affected by the recent conflict in Burundi. The estimated cost of the latest tranche of food aid is $45.4 million, including the funds to transport the food to the affected people. WFP said there was little hope that the crisis would be defused and the refugees enabled to go home in the foreseeable future.

Following the abortive military coup in Burundi on 21 October 1993, tribal conflict erupted between the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu tribes in much of the country, particularly in the rural areas. Huge numbers of people were forced to flee their homes in search of safe havens. About 250,000 people displaced by the fighting are living in schools, churches and administrative or social centres or in makeshift camps in isolated regions of the country.

By the end of 1993, there were an estimated 375,000 Burundese refugees in Rwanda, with 300,000 in Tanzania, and from 39,000 to 50,000 in Zaire. A census is now under way to determine the exact number of refugees in need of relief assistance.

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The situation of women in the former Yugoslavia will be among the issues to be discussed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women when it holds its thirteenth session at Headquarters from 17 January to 4 February. In accordance with its mandate, the Committee will also discuss the measures taken by 13 States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to ensure equal participation of women in their countries' political, economic and cultural life.

The 23-member expert Committee is the monitoring body for the implementation of the 1979 Convention. States parties are required to submit an initial report within one year of accession to the Convention and periodic reports at least every four years. At this session the Committee will be considering the initial reports of Guyana, Madagascar, Libya and the Netherlands, and both the initial and periodic reports of Zambia and Guatemala. The Committee will also consider, among other issues, its contribution to the forthcoming Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in September 1995.

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The United Nations body negotiating an international convention to combat desertification will hold its third substantive session at Headquarters from 17 to 28 January. The Negotiating Committee will focus its consideration on a 42-article draft text for the final legally binding convention, which is expected to be adopted and opened for signature in June.

The spread of desert conditions, resulting from such factors as climate variation and human activity, now affects about one-sixth of the world's

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population and a quarter of the earth's total land area. In attempting to create consensus on how to deal with the problem, the negotiators still have a number of questions to settle. These include proposals relating to financial mechanisms to help combat desertification; the content of national and regional action programmes; the establishment of a scientific and technological council; the establishment of an evaluation and monitoring centre; and approaches to dispute prevention and settlement.

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